

# Teachers and Parents Involvement for a Good School Experience of Native and Immigrant Children

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## IL COINVOLGIMENTO DI GENITORI E INSEGNANTI PER UN'ESPERIENZA SCOLASTICA POSITIVA DI BAMBINI NATIVI E IMMIGRATI

### ABSTRACT

*The increased and stable presence of immigrant children in preschools and in primary schools in Italy in the last twenty years, makes more and more important the study of the attitudes and behaviours in teachers, parents and children. As it is known, attitudes and behaviours can strongly influence school experience (relationships and achievements) of children from native as well as from immigrant families. Several international studies and surveys showed that children from immigrant families are more likely to drop out from*

*school much before getting a diploma or a professional qualification (Anisef et al., 2010; Brunello & Rocco, 2012; De Witte et al., 2013). The reason for it can be found in their socio-demographic conditions, their insufficient knowledge of the host country language and the inadequacy of educational policies for immigrants. Furthermore, the co-existence in the same school of immigrant children and autochthone children creating a constant intercultural and interethnic contact puts forward the need to handle prejudice development, in view of the social integration of the immigrant children. In this paper we present a study exploring the relationship between personality, educational style and prejudice of parents in native and in immigrant families regarding immigrant children's social integration. Results show important relations among these parents' characteristics, together with differences between native and immigrant families. These findings could provide a contribution in implementing adequate intervention programmes supporting the school integration of immigrant children.*

**Keywords:** Acculturation strategies, Children adjustment, Ethnic prejudice, Parenting styles, Personality traits.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since infancy, children show clear ethnic preferences: in tasks where they are required to choose among ethnically different people, they tend to choose members of their own ethnic group and they show to master some kind of ethnic awareness (Aboud, 1988; Aboud & Doyle, 1996; Nesdale, 2001; Castelli, De Amicis, & Sherman, 2007). With the child's development, the process of ethnic – racial discrimination appears to become more accurate and to refer not only to white and black groups but also to other categories (Fox & Jordan, 1973; Rice, Ruiz, & Padilla, 1974; Weiland & Coughlin, 1979; Aboud, 1988; Neto & Paiva, 1998).

An Italian study found that most of the children in day-care centres and kindergarten (80% in day-care and 90% in kindergarten) would prefer to play with a white than with a the black child (Castelli, De Amicis, & Sherman, 2007). Similarly, in specific tasks on ethnic awareness children tend to attribute positive characteristics to the whites and negative characteristic to the blacks (Castelli, Zogmaister, & Tomelleri, 2009). These discriminations are not only related to the physical attributes but also to internal states.

Where do these attitudes come from? On one hand a very important role in the development of these mental models is played by the child's cognitive processes and by the interaction between the children and their

physical and social environment. During infancy, children use stereotypes as fixed models of knowledge and representation of the world in order to simplify the description of social groups and to make the reality more understandable (Aboud 1988; Brown, 1995). On the other hand, the social processes which involve the children, particularly during the preschool and school age when the engagement in stable social groups and social interactions increases, influence their ethnic attitudes (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). Researches show that the development of intergroup attitudes is a result of the interaction between genetic predispositions, socialization influences, and situational determinants (Hatemi *et al.*, 2009). Developmental and social psychological theories highlighted the role of socializing agents, suggesting that children's intergroup attitudes are a function of the attitudes of their significant adults (e.g. the parents) via the process of social transmission (Radke-Yarrow, Trager, & Miller, 1952; Allport, 1954; Bandura, 1977; Nesdale, 2001; Aboud & Amato, 2002). According to the theory of social learning, parents are role models for their offspring (Bandura, 1977) and adults might influence children's attitudes in several ways (Bigler & Liben, 2007). Children, seeking parental acceptance, internalize parents' prejudiced or tolerant beliefs, fostering intergenerational correspondence in attitudes (Allport, 1954; Acocck, 1984). However, research in the field of the intergenerational transmission of attitudes is controversial: some studies found correlations between children's and parents' prejudice (Mosher & Scodel, 1960; Katz, 2003), while others found children and parents' prejudice to be unrelated (Aboud & Doyle, 1996; Towles-Schwen & Fazio, 2001; Hatemi & McDermott, 2012). Furthermore, the correlation between parents' and children's attitudes during childhood seems to be present when children are strongly identified with their parents (Sinclair, Dunn, & Lowery, 2005). Likewise, Allport (1954) argued that children adopt their parents' perspective to the extent that they desire their approval. Because parents are often the first and main source of information, children tend to imitate and conform to the explicit attitudes and behaviours of their parents. Parents provide children with verbal and nonverbal information about the outgroup, thus promoting feelings of anxiety or, conversely, inducing tolerance (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). In fact, strong similarities can be found in the linguistic expressions, wrong judgements and incongruities expressed by parents and their children towards minority groups (Radke-Yarrow, Trager, & Miller, 1952; Robinson, 1972). Very young children can also pick up the nonverbal behaviour (e.g. avoidance of eye contact) of their parents interacting with out-group members (Castelli, De Dea, & Nesdale, 2008). On the other hand, parents can also actively engage in transmitting intergroup attitudes by creating learning environments in which they

intentionally teach their children basic social values, norms and behaviours (Meeusen, 2014).

The intergenerational transmission of attitudes is an important process linked to the fact that stable individual factors (as psychological attributes, personality characteristics) (see e.g. Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Altemeyer, 1988; Ekehammar & Akrami, 2003) and social interaction with minority groups (Allport, 1954) may lead to have more or less prejudices. In the first case, personality factors as Agreeableness and Openness to Experience are negatively associated with and predict generalized prejudice. Unfortunately, most of the studies investigating the personality/prejudice relation focus generalized prejudice, only partially considering the ethnic prejudice. Actually, researches investigating the relationship between personality and prejudice consider two individual variables: Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA; see e.g. Altemeyer, 1988) and/or Social Dominance Orientation (SDO; see e.g. Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Panno *et al.*, 2017). However, these two variables are not properly personality individual traits but refer to intra- and inter-groups relationships and attitudes in-between personality and social psychology (Ekehammar & AKrami, 2003). In the case of social interactions, having immigrant friends seems to be a protective factor reducing parents' prejudice and the transmissibility to their children (Bigler & Liben, 2007).

Other individual characteristics seem to be related to personality and to play a role in the transmission of the prejudices to children. For example, the transmission of ethnic prejudices seems to occur mainly in families with authoritarian parenting patterns (Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2004).

A rigid parenting enhances children's aggressive behaviours towards weak groups as, for example, the minority ethnic groups. Parental practices including punitive parenting or promoting children's behaviours based on extrinsic goals at the expense of intrinsic goals could have the effect of stimulating competition, thus enhancing the children's ethnic prejudice (Duriez, 2011). The more the parents promote extrinsic *vs.* intrinsic goals, the more their offspring could show negative attitudes toward immigrants. The strong relation between parental extrinsic goal promotion and individual extrinsic goal pursuit confirms that parents are important role models for their children. A harsh or restrictive parenting lead not only to higher children's ethnic prejudice but also to socio-emotional problems and poorer academic performances (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992; Harkness & Super, 1995; Pearson & Rao, 2003; Aunola & Nurmi, 2005). Belsky and Barends (2002) also show that personality characteristics as Extraversion, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness are related to authoritative parenting while higher levels of Neuroticism affect authoritarian parenting (Downey & Coyne, 1990; Kochanska, Clark, & Goldman, 1997).

Children's ethnic prejudices are expressed in their social behaviour, which, in turns, is importantly influenced by the parenting style adopted by their parents. In fact, children in authoritative homes were found to be more friendly with peers, more independent and assertive, cooperative with parents, and achievement oriented. By contrast, children in authoritarian homes were found to be more hostile and shy with peers, overly dependent on parents and less achievement oriented. Interestingly, children in permissive homes exhibited several of the same characteristics (e.g., non assertiveness, dependency, and poor self-control) as children in authoritarian homes. Despite the appearance of being diametrically opposite rearing styles, authoritarian and permissive parenting hold in common the propensity to minimize opportunities for children to learn to cope with stress, as for example the adjustment to a multicultural environment. Authoritarian parents do this by curtailing the children's pursuits of their own initiatives while permissive parents do this by giving their children free rein and failing to establish and enforce standards of conduct. The result is a reduction in the capacity to cope with frustration and disappointment and to adaptively deal with everyday life challenges (Baumrind, 1973; Deković & Janssens, 1992; Aunola, Stattin, & Nurmi, 2000; Hickman, Bartholomae, & McHenry, 2000; Kaufmann *et al.*, 2000).

Families who feel to be able to provide an effective and supportive parenting may also be able to buffer the effects of environmental stressors (Pettit, Bates, & Dodge, 1997; Masten *et al.*, 1988) and to assure the psychological adjustment of both the parents and their children (Jones & Prinz, 2005). For example, difficult circumstances – as the experience of migration – create a range of stressors that interfere with positive parenting abilities and, in turn, portend negative consequences for children (McLoyd, 1998). In particular, immigrant parents with a greater orientation toward a culture – whether it is their origins' or the new country culture – feel less stressed and isolated (e.g. Berry, 2006), are less likely to resolve conflicts through the use of harsh parenting methods (Ortega, 2001), and use more effective parenting practices (e.g. Conger, Patterson, & Ge, 1995). However, consistently with acculturation theory (Berry, 2003), a higher orientation toward the new culture is associated with fewer stressors and better parents' ability to cope with the demands of intercultural living, which supports a better psychological adjustment for them and for their children. Also socio-cultural background influences parenting strategies. For example, comparing the parenting style of European and Asian families in USA, Chao (2000 and 2001) showed that Asian families were higher on authoritarian parenting style than European families, mostly due to their higher control over the children.

Parents are not the only source of influence on children's development, wellbeing and adjustment and the network created by the significant adults of

a child play an important role, which have been investigated by the psychological literature. On the one hand, the teachers play an important role in the children's social adaptation (Birch & Ladd, 1997 and 1998) and school achievement (Pianta, 1999). On the other hand, the children's social and school integration and the development of their social skills are enhanced by a positive relationship between the teachers and the parents (Comer, 1988; Reynolds, 1992; Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspro, & Fendrich 1999; Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, & Ortiz, 2008). The parents' involvement in their children's school life is related to a higher academic achievement (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004) and fewer behavioural problems (Comer, 1984) and social marginality (McNeal, 1999). School and family reciprocally influence each other: children's development is not only a product of their individual characteristics but primarily of the action of people in the life contexts where the child learns social behaviours and develops cognitive and linguistic abilities, and secondly of the context created by the interactions among the child's life contexts. Thus, we can talk of a paradigm of interdependence among teachers, parents and children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Panzeri, 2001).

In line with the existent literature, the present study aims to explore the relations among parents' personality, parenting style, home-school relationship, and ethnic prejudice in Italian native families and integration of immigrant families. Additionally, the study analyses the difference between native and migrant parents for the common measured variables. Focusing on these parents' individual characteristics helps us to better clarify their relations. This makes possible to design interventions that prevent negative consequences for children adjustment and that enhance a real positive integration among native and immigrant children at school. In line with our hypothesis, we expect that parents' personality traits would be related to parenting styles. In particular, parents with higher scores in Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Openness to experience would show a higher score in authoritative parenting style. These parents would also show a better relationship with the school. Among these parents, we expect the Italian parents to show a lower ethnic prejudice and the immigrant parents a higher integration with the host society. Conversely, we hypothesize that parents with higher score in Neuroticism will show higher scores in authoritarian and permissive parenting styles and have a worse relationship with the school. Similarly, we expect that the Italian parents with this personality and parenting styles have higher scores in ethnic prejudice and the immigrant parents with this personality and parenting styles will lower scores about the integration.

Moreover, we wanted to understand if the perceived presence of immigrants in their city and the amount of contacts with immigrant people could influence the level of prejudice in Italian parents and the level of integra-

tion in immigrant parents. We expect that Italian parents with a appropriate perception of the number of immigrants in their area and that have contacts with immigrants would show a lower level of ethnic prejudice. At the same time we expect that immigrant parents with a correct perception about the amount of other immigrant families' in their area would be integrated, showing high scores in adopting the host culture and in maintaining the home culture. Immigrant parents involved in frequent contacts with other immigrants could adopt a marginalization strategy displaying low scores in embracing the host culture and high scores in maintaining the home culture. Additionally, we wanted to analyse if the condition of «being immigrant» and a specific acculturation strategy influence the parenting style. In line with literature, we expected that Italian parents show a higher level of authoritative parenting than the immigrant parents and expect also that immigrant parents who adopted a segregation strategy show higher level of authoritarian parenting.

Finally, we hypothesize that the home-school relationship for immigrant families changes according to the acculturation strategies adopted. Integration and assimilation strategies should be associated with better home-school relationship.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1. *Procedure*

Data were collected during the school year 2012/2013 in 11 preschools and primary schools in Rome and province, in areas where the presence of immigrant people were supposed to be high.

This data collection was intended as an explorative study prior to an intervention study – the SOFT («School and family together for the integration of immigrant children») Project<sup>1</sup> – aiming at promoting the school integration of children from immigrant families.

We contacted the schools' principals in order to inform them about the SOFT project and proposing them to participate. Where the school agreed, we met the teachers and arranged with them the administration of the questionnaires to the students' parents.

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## 2.2. Participants

The parents of 366 students returned filled questionnaires, among them the parents of 175 children attending preschool (26 three years old, 60 four years old, 89 five years old) and 191 children attending year 1 and 4 of primary school (110 seven years old, 8 eight years old and 73 nine years old).

Among the respondents 260 were native Italian, 79 immigrants and 25 mixed couples (Italian parent - immigrant parent). In this last case the immigrant parent completed the questionnaire.

## 2.3. Measures

One parent per student (mostly the mother) responded to a questionnaire including the following scales:

- *Personality*: it was measured with a 15 items version of the *Big Five (Labif2)* (Perugini, Gallucci, & Livi, 2000), a list of adjective for which the respondent answers on a Likert scale from 1 (it does not describe me at all) to 7 (it describes me perfectly).
- *Ethnic prejudice (only for Italian parents)*: it was measured with the Italian adaptation (Arcuri & Boca, 1996) of the questionnaire by Pettigrew and Meertens (1995). The first ten items measure the blatant prejudice (e.g. «Immigrants take jobs that should be up to Italians»), the other ten measure the subtle prejudice (e.g. «Immigrants who live in our country transmit to their children values and abilities not required in Italy»). The total prejudice is the sum of blatant and subtle prejudice. High scores for the two scales indicate a high level of prejudice. The scores originate three profiles: egalitarian (low scores in both the scales of prejudice), fanatic (high scores in both the scales of prejudice) and subtle (low score in the scale of blatant prejudice and high score in the scale of subtle prejudice).
- *Integration (only for immigrant parents)*: we administered the *Relative Acculturation Extended Model* (RAEM; Navas *et al.*, 2005). A back translation was employed for this study. The scale consists in 21 Likert scale items from 1 (never) to 5 (always) items measuring the attitudes towards the real / ideal maintenance of their origin culture (e.g. «The extent to which you maintain the customs and traditions of your home country», «The extent to which you would like to maintain the customs and traditions of your home country») and adoption of the host country culture (e.g. «The extent to which you adopt the customs and traditions of the host country», «The extent to which you would like to adopt the customs and traditions of the host country») in relation to work, consumption behaviour, family



relationships, religion and customs, way of thinking, principles and values. The scores describe the acculturation strategies as: integration, assimilation, marginalization and separation.

- *Parenting*: it was measured by a 32 items version of the *Parent Style and Dimension Questionnaire* (Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen, & Hart, 2001) that describes three parenting profiles: authoritative (e.g. «I am responsive to my child's feelings and needs»), authoritarian (e.g. «I use criticism to make my child improve his/her behaviour»), and permissive (e.g. «I find it difficult to discipline my child»). The scale was back translated in Italian.
- *School-Home relationship*: it was measured by three different items on a Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (more often than once a week) created for the purpose of this study: (1) the frequency of the parents' interest in the child's school life, (2) the frequency of the teacher contacts with the student's family, (3) the quality of school-home relationship.
- *Perception of the migratory situation*: one multiple choice item was employed to measure the participants' perception about the number of the immigrants living in their city. The answers were coded as underestimation, appropriate estimation or overestimation of the actual statistical data (ISTAT, 2012).
- *Relations with immigrants*: a two items scale was purposely built to measure the amount of contacts with immigrants and the amount of immigrant friends (e.g. «How many immigrant friends do you have?»).

### 3. RESULTS

Correlations among variables and reliability are reported in *Table 1*.

The 46.4% of Italian respondents overestimate the real amount of immigrant people in their city, a smaller number of them, the 39.1% underestimate it and a very few percentage give the correct answer (14.6%). The 71.9% of the Italian parents daily meets immigrants, the 12% few times a week, the 6.8% few times a month, the 6.4% few times a year, the 2.8% never meet immigrants. Among the Italian parents, the 10.2% has many immigrant friends, the 58.5% some immigrant friends, the 8.5% has only one immigrant friend and the remaining 22.8% have not any immigrant friend.

The 60.2% of immigrant respondents are Caucasians, the 19.3% Asian, the 9.1% South American, the 5.7% African. The 3.4% of immigrant families have an Italian and an African parent. The 1.1% have an Italian and a South American parent. The 1.1% are Arabians.

Table 1. – Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Extraversion	<b><math>\alpha = .658</math></b>																
2. Agreeableness	.276**	<b><math>\alpha = .818</math></b>															
3. Conscientiousness	.098	.511**	<b><math>\alpha = .774</math></b>														
4. Emotion Stability	.090	-.054	-.083	<b><math>\alpha = .680</math></b>													
5. AMental Openness	.285**	.252**	.095	-.047	<b><math>\alpha = .854</math></b>												
6. Authoritative Style	.185**	.230**	.106	.112*	.150**	<b><math>\alpha = .745</math></b>											
7. Autoritharian Style	-.152**	-.151**	-.098	-.200**	-.032	-.350**	<b><math>\alpha = .801</math></b>										
8. Permissive Style	-.157**	-.081	-.063	-.058	-.006	-.094	.424**	<b><math>\alpha = .479</math></b>									
9. Blatant Prejudice	-.029	.045	.175**	-.070	.105	-.272**	.258**	.148*	<b><math>\alpha = .834</math></b>								
10. Subtle Prejudice	.082	.025	.158*	-.096	.061	-.108	.177**	.115	.567**	<b><math>\alpha = .716</math></b>							
11. Real Origin	.076	-.099	.090	-.032	-.082	-.064	.094	-.079	-	-	<b><math>\alpha = .823</math></b>						
12. Real Host	.048	.030	-.003	.150	.086	.221	-.106	-.257*	-	-	.325**	<b><math>\alpha = .816</math></b>					
13. Ideal Origin	.050	.051	.154	.051	-.112	.084	-.148	-.165	-	-	.583**	.355**	<b><math>\alpha = 813</math></b>				
14. Ideal Host	.118	.130	.127	.269*	.059	.395*	-.102	-.50	-	-	.201	.507**	.351**	<b><math>\alpha = .363</math></b>			
15. Teacher contacts	-.137**	-.115**	-.059	-.001	-.039	-.028	.086	.140*	-.024	.046	-.169	-.195	-.176	-.126	/		
16. Parent interest	.083	-.021	.008	-.036	-.018	.124**	-.088	.000	-.017	-.020	-.045	.293*	-.163	.129	.040	/	
17. School-Home Relationship	.030	.232**	.162**	.148*	.138*	.156**	-.133**	-.021	.045	.061	.002	.089	-.064	-.073	.206*	.001	/

\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ . Alpha coefficients are not displayed for single item measures.

Most of the immigrant respondents report to be integrated (66.7%), and few of them report to be assimilated (14.7%), marginalized (9.3%) or separated (9.3%). As the Italian respondents, our immigrant participants mostly overestimate the amount of immigrant people in their Italian city (43.1%), 39.7% underestimates it and only 17.2% gave the correct answer. The 64.7% meets daily other immigrants, the 14.7% few times a week, the 7.4% few times a month, the 13.2% few times a year, the 0% never meet immigrants. The trend is quite different from Italian parents for the item concerning the relationship with immigrant friends. The 47.1% has many immigrant friends, the 39.7% have some immigrant friends, the 4.4% have only one immigrant friends and the remaining 8.8% don't have any immigrant friend.

The Conscientiousness personality trait is related with blatant ( $r = .175$ ,  $p < .01$ ), subtle ( $r = .158$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and total prejudice ( $r = .183$ ,  $p < .01$ ) of Italian respondents. Among immigrant parents, Neuroticism negatively correlates with the ideal adoption of the host country culture ( $r = -.269$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Personality also confirms to be related to parenting style. In particular Extraversion is positively associated with Authoritative style ( $r = .185$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and negatively associated with Authoritarian ( $r = -.152$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and Permissive styles ( $r = -.157$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Agreeableness positively correlates with the Authoritative style ( $r = .23$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and negatively correlates with the Authoritarian style ( $r = -.151$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Mental Openness is positively associated with the adoption of an Authoritative style ( $r = .150$ ,  $p < .01$ ) but no significant correlations were found with Authoritarian or Permissive styles. Conversely, Neuroticism correlates positively with Authoritarian style ( $r = .200$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and negatively with the authoritative style ( $r = -.112$ ,  $p < .05$ ). No correlation has been found between Conscientiousness and parenting styles.

The school contacts more frequently parents with lower scores in Extraversion ( $r = -.137$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and Agreeableness ( $r = -.115$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In turn, parents' Agreeableness ( $r = .232$ ,  $p < .01$ ), Conscientiousness ( $r = .162$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and Openness ( $r = .138$ ,  $p < .05$ ) positively correlate with the quality of the school-family relationship, which negatively correlates with Neuroticism ( $r = -.148$ ,  $p < .05$ ). No significant correlations were found between personality traits and the interest of the parent for the child's school life.

The blatant prejudice negatively correlates with the Authoritative parenting style ( $r = -.272$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and positively correlates with the Authoritarian ( $r = .258$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and Permissive ( $r = .148$ ,  $p < .05$ ) parenting styles. The subtle prejudice shows only a positive correlation with the Authoritarian parenting ( $r = .177$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

The parents with higher scores for Authoritative parenting style are more interested to the child school life ( $r = .124$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and have a better

relationship with the school ( $r = .156, p < .01$ ). The Parents who rate more negatively their relationship with the school show a higher level of Authoritarian parenting style ( $r = -.133, p < .05$ ). Permissive parenting style positively correlates with school-family contact ( $r = .140, p < .05$ ).

Among immigrant families, the parents who show a higher real integration with the host culture have a higher level of Authoritative parenting style ( $r = .224, p < .05$ ) and of interest towards the school life of their child ( $r = .275, p < .05$ ). Also, the ideal integration with the host culture positively correlates with the Authoritative parenting style ( $r = .406, p < .01$ ). Conversely, the real integration with the host culture negatively correlates with the permissive parenting style ( $r = -.262, p < .05$ ).

A series of univariate analyses of the variance highlighted that:

- The Italian parents who affirm to have many immigrant friends show a lower subtle prejudice than Italian parents with some, one or any immigrant friends ( $F_{(235,3)} = 5.52, p = .001$ ). Thus, the level of prejudice changes according to the relationships with immigrants.
- No differences are observable in the Italian parents' level of prejudice on the basis of their perception of immigrant people in their city (blatant prejudice:  $F_{(225,3)} = 1.06, p = .347$ ; subtle prejudice:  $F_{(225,3)} = 1.3, p = .273$ ).
- The immigrant parents who underestimate the presence of other immigrant persons in their host city, maintain their home customs and tradition with a higher level than those who overestimate this presence ( $F_{(2,47)} = 5.52, p < .01$ ).
- The immigrant parents' level of integration doesn't change according to the type of relationships with other immigrants (*occasional meeting*: real origin,  $F_{(3,55)} = .65, p = .59$ ; ideal origin,  $F_{(3,55)} = .23, p = .99$ ; real host,  $F_{(3,55)} = 1.12, p = .35$ ; ideal host,  $F_{(3,55)} = .11, p = .95$ ; *friendship*: real origin,  $F_{(3,55)} = .36, p = .78$ ; ideal origin,  $F_{(3,55)} = .18, p = .91$ ; real host,  $F_{(3,55)} = .90, p = .97$ ; ideal host,  $F_{(3,55)} = .44, p = .72$ ).
- The immigrant parents in non-mixed families show a higher level of Authoritarian parenting style than the Italian parents and the immigrant parents in mixed couple ( $F_{(2,358)} = 3.159, p = .001$ ).
- No significant differences arose in the parenting style on the basis of acculturation strategies of immigrant parents (authoritative style:  $F_{(74,3)} = .56, p = .643$ ; authoritarian style:  $F_{(74,3)} = .51, p = .677$ ; permissive style:  $F_{(74,3)} = 1.7, p = .173$ ).
- The immigrant parents' home-school relationship doesn't change across the different types of acculturation strategies (interest to the child school life:  $F_{(3,53)} = 1.58, p = .20$ ; school-family contact:  $F_{(3,59)} = .55, p = .65$ ; quality of parent-teacher relationship:  $F_{(3,57)} = .28, p = .84$ ).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

In this paper we wanted to consider the social antecedents of ethnic prejudice in children, in a standpoint that can integrate an individual differences perspective on prejudice to provide a better explanation of its development and expression. Our data show that among personality traits only the Conscientiousness is positively related to blatant and subtle ethnic prejudice. The other traits don't show any relations with ethnic prejudice, thus partially confirming our hypothesis. Our findings confirm those in the literature about the role of personality in the implementation of a specific parenting style (Huver, Otten, De Vries, & Engels, 2010) and underlie the relationship between prejudice and parenting (Daglar, Melhuish, & Barnes, 2011). In fact, in our data, more extrovert, agreeable, emotionally stable and mentally open parents show also higher levels of authoritative parenting style towards their children.

The Italian parents of our study, whose children attend schools with a large presence of immigrant children, show a moderate level of prejudice. Furthermore, higher levels of prejudice are associated with higher levels of authoritarian parenting style. This could negatively affect the relationship among the children of the same class, due to the action of the intergenerational transmission of prejudice on one hand (Duriez & Soenens, 2009; Dhont, Roets, & Van Hiel, 2012) and of the influence of parental practices on children's behaviour on the other hand (Duriez, 2011). Therefore, parenting style and parents' prejudice could represent an obstacle to the occurrence of children's extra-school encounters and social events thus reducing the activation of children resources' to front different contextual inputs, as ethnic diversity. In our study, the Italian parents who affirm to have many immigrant friends also have a lower level of subtle prejudice. This finding confirms our initial hypothesis according to Allport (1954) intergroup contact theory.

We found a relevant frequency of immigrant parents showing an acculturation strategy that can be non functional for the children's adjustment to the school context (e.g. separation, marginalization). The immigrant parents of this study who underestimate the presence of other immigrant people in their own environment, are more likely to maintain their home traditions and the relationships with other immigrant persons don't influence their integration as we hypothesized. Usually, a strong orientation to the culture of the host country – that is an assimilation strategy – or to both the host country and the origin country culture – that is an integration strategy – put the immigrant parents in a social context (the Italian or their home country) where they feel integrated and, thus, they can benefit from social resources useful for effective parenting practices. On the contrary, the parents with an acculturation strategy based on separation or marginalization are at risk for

experiencing stress and difficulties in managing their parental tasks. With respect to the parenting role specifically, parents who are more involved in the host culture are more likely to take advantage of parenting resources that are available in the community. These parents may also possess the cultural knowledge and language skills necessary to effectively interact with key figures in their children's world (Costigan & Korizma, 2011). Parents who are more oriented toward the host society may be more familiar with the expectations of the school system and may also feel more confident discussing their child's progress (or difficulties) with the teachers (Costigan, Hua, & Su, 2010). In addition, they may be more likely to informally consult with other parents and receive help from them, such as monitoring their children's whereabouts and social interactions. Importantly, parents with a integration or assimilation strategy may also interact with their own children with greater ease, because their language skills may be more similar and they may share more experiences, resulting in stronger feelings of connection (Costigan & Dokis, 2006). They also are more likely to positively master experiences in the parenting domain, which feed their perceived self-efficacy in parenting in a new cultural context (Costigan & Korizma, 2011). This is closely related to the findings of our study where immigrant parents with high levels of integration with the host culture also show a parenting style based on love, emotional support and clear rules for what is considered an appropriate behaviour.

Furthermore, our findings confirm that authoritative style is associated with the parental involvement in the child's schooling and the parents' relationship with the teacher. Conversely, the adoption of an authoritarian style is linked with a worse relationship with the teacher, while the more permissive parents are more frequently contacted by their child's teachers. Probably, these two aspects influence each other: authoritative parents are interested to their children school life attending more frequently the school context and having more contacts with the teachers. The school positive feed-backs help them to improve their parenting efficacy and to enforce more efficient educative strategies.

Italian or mixed couples parents tend to be more authoritative than immigrants parents and in the immigrant group the parents with assimilation and integration strategies are also more likely to act as authoritative parents and to be more involved in the school experience and activities of their child. However, even if the acculturation strategies didn't directly influence the immigrant parents-school relationship of our group, the immigration could represent an aggravating condition added to a negative parenting style that is associated to more children's behavioural problems and less social competence (Daglar, Melhuish, & Barnes, 2011). Generally speaking, literature reports a better functioning in children of immigrant parents who are successfully adapted, in terms of psychological and sociocultural outcomes,

socio-economical and professional social status, who also speak well the language of the host culture, and have supportive friends or close contact with their ethnic community. Parental emotional well-being, family functioning, ethnic community vitality with strong social support network have all been linked to low levels of psychological stress (Sowa, Crijnen, Bengi-Arslan, & Verhulst, 2000; Stansfeld *et al.*, 2004).

## 5. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

Taken together, these findings support the need to take into account the specific social environment where the children live to fully understand their intergroup attitudes, and eventually intervene on them. One important implication of these findings is that because children's racial attitudes are indeed influenced by social factors, they are also potentially malleable. This permits to plan intervention programmes aiming to promote the creation of appropriate conditions for positive intergroup relationships, which, in turn, will foster the immigrant children school adjustment. Following the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954) in its more recent development (Rodríguez-García & Wagner, 2009) the school action of involving children and parents (via the teachers) in common and shared activities in a positive and inclusive social climate could promote the change of prejudicial attitudes in the adults and in the children and create a more egalitarian social context. Recent researches emphasized the role of personal intergroup contact experiences as a superior determinant of outgroup attitudes compared to parental influence: there are strong positive relations between parents and children's racial prejudice levels for children with low levels of intergroup contact (Rodríguez-García & Wagner, 2009; Dhont & Van Hiel, 2012). Planning and organizing positive inclusive experiences for native and immigrant people may represent a protective factor for families' functioning and children's development, also by designing positive school settings for children wellbeing (Carrus, Passiatore, Pirchio, & Scopelliti, 2015; Carrus *et al.*, 2017). The general aim of this interventions could be to give the adults the competence to create an educational environment emphasizing the importance of building up positive relationships and to raise the parents' awareness of the relations among acculturation, ethnic prejudice, parenting efficacy and adjustment. The social community given by the school, as a social context dedicated to shared education, should support the adjustment of immigrant parents as individuals and as parents, with benefits reverberating among the family members.

Several limitations of this study must be acknowledged. First, the data are only collected from parents. The inclusion of data about teachers and



children could permit to analyse the teacher-parents relationship from the teacher's perspective and to consider their relational contribution for the individual and social variables considered in the research. Second, the data about the school-family partnership are collected using three items (two about the frequency of the teacher-parents relationship and one about the quality of this relationship) specifically created for this research and not previously validated through other researches. Third, we did not test the intergenerational transmission of prejudice and the influence of parenting style on children's behaviour and their adjustment to the school context. These findings should be deepened including the other two main characters of school context, teachers and children, to better understand and explain the intra individual and inter individual relationship among the variables considered in this research.

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## RIASSUNTO

*La presenza strutturale crescente di bambini immigrati nella scuola dell'infanzia e primaria in Italia nelle ultime due decadi rende sempre più importante lo studio degli atteggiamenti e comportamenti di insegnanti, genitori e bambini. È noto che atteggiamenti e attitudes and comportamenti possono influenzare notevolmente l'esperienza scolastica (a livello di relazioni sociali e rendimento) dei bambini provenienti da famiglie native e immigrate. Numerosi studi internazionali hanno mostrato che studenti e alunni provenienti da famiglie immigrate sono soggetti a una maggiore probabilità di abbandono scolastico, soprattutto prima di ottenere un diploma o una qualifica professionale (Anisef et al., 2010; De Witte et al., 2013; Brunello & Rocco, 2012). Il motivo di ciò può essere attribuito alle condizioni socio-demografiche, alla non completa conoscenza della lingua del paese ospitante, e all'inadeguatezza delle politiche educative per l'immigrazione. Inoltre, la compresenza di bambini autoctoni e immigrati nella stessa scuola crea le condizioni per un contatto interculturale e interetnico costante, e rende necessaria la gestione e il contenimento del pregiudizio, ai fini di una migliore integrazione dei bambini immigrati. In questo lavoro viene presentato uno studio che esplora, nei genitori di famiglie native e immigrate, la relazione tra personalità, stile educativo e pregiudizio nei confronti dell'integrazione sociale dei bambini. I risultati mostrano l'esistenza di importanti relazioni tra questi fattori, e l'esistenza di differenze tra famiglie native e immigrate. Questi risultati possono essere di supporto per l'implementazione di programmi di intervento adeguati che favoriscano l'integrazione scolastica dei bambini immigrati.*

*Parole chiave:* Adattamento del bambino, Personalità, Pregiudizio etnico, Stile di parenting, Strategie di acculturazione.

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